



Don Leach/The News

Sy Coblens, Leisure Worlder of the Month for June, has a library of law books in his manor which he continually uses for research while serving on the Legal Committee.

The price of a civilized society

Honoree believes in service to his community

By Cheryl Walker
The News

Leisure World resident Sy Coblens paraphrases Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. when asked why he's contributed his retirement years to the service of this community.

"Justice Holmes says 'taxes are what we pay for a civilized society.' Well community service is the price we pay for living in a community . . . there just ain't no such thing as free lunch."

More than 13 committee assignments and a three-year term as a Golden Rain director show how faithfully Coblens adheres to that bit of wisdom - and helps explain why the Leisure World Historical Society selected him as Leisure Worlder for June.

"I believe in the work and I've done it in every community I've lived in," says Coblens, pointing to a varied service background that includes presidency of the Boys and Girls Aid Society and trusteeship of United Appeal in Oregon; a director of the Robinson Jewish Home and Temple Judea; memberships in nearly a dozen professional groups; even a group leader's stint in this community's Foreign Policy Association.

Coblens traces his service orientation to his family.

His mother was a social worker in the city of his birth, New York, and his father was an attorney and great believer in education.

Coblens holds degrees from three colleges, a bachelor's from the City College of New York, a master's from Columbia University and a doctorate in jurisprudence from Harvard.

He's also taught history and social studies on the high school level and political and social science and law at the university level; authored

JUNE'S LEISURE WORLDER

Who: Seymour Coblens
When: Wednesday, June 2
Time: 10 to 11 a.m.
Where: Clubhouse 6.
Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society

articles for legal journals and other professional publications; and engaged in a diverse professional career that included private practice, corporate and governmental law.

Eugene Conser, legal committee advisor, says the community is indebted to Coblens for his leadership and sharing his expertise. "He's a good lawyer with a lot of common sense and has clarified many an issue for us - without legal fee."

Margaret Busby, executive assistant to General Manager Russ Disbro, also says Coblens' legal advice to Leisure World has been outstanding: "The community is very fortunate to have him as a volunteer.

"I became an admirer of Sy's several years ago when I had the very good fortune, or timing, to

be assigned the job of staff officer to the legal committee . . . and he became the chairman of the committee.

"(He's) a 'gentleman of the old school', one of an almost extinct species today. In addition to his knowledge and experience in the legal field, he has an excellent sense of how to treat people - in a kindly manner that shows he respects their opinions even though he may disagree with them.

"(He's) the type of person who can analyze the problem and see the broader issues involved and then get to the nuts and bolts of the matter.

"I soon found that if I asked him a question on a legal matter, I not only got an answer to that question, but an explanation of the law involved and an opportunity to see the situation from an experienced legal perspective."

Asked about his people skills, Coblens says they're the fruit of experience. "If I let things get me wild, I'd get a heart attack, high blood pressure or a stroke."

Coblens says when an emotional situation arises he sits back calmly and gives his opponent full range to rant and rave.

When the opponent finally runs out of wind, he'll rationally and reasonably state his case. "Shouters get people to pay attention, but do they convince? I feel shouting is no substitute for reasoned analysis.

"I don't believe in getting personal when you have an argument on a principal of law . . . you should keep yourself on the subject and address what you're addressing.

"Whether you win or not you'll keep your sanity - and you don't want to be ashamed of yourself afterwards."

Coblens admits he's his own severest critic.

"You do the best you can, make your best case and hope it sticks to the people who are going to make the decision."